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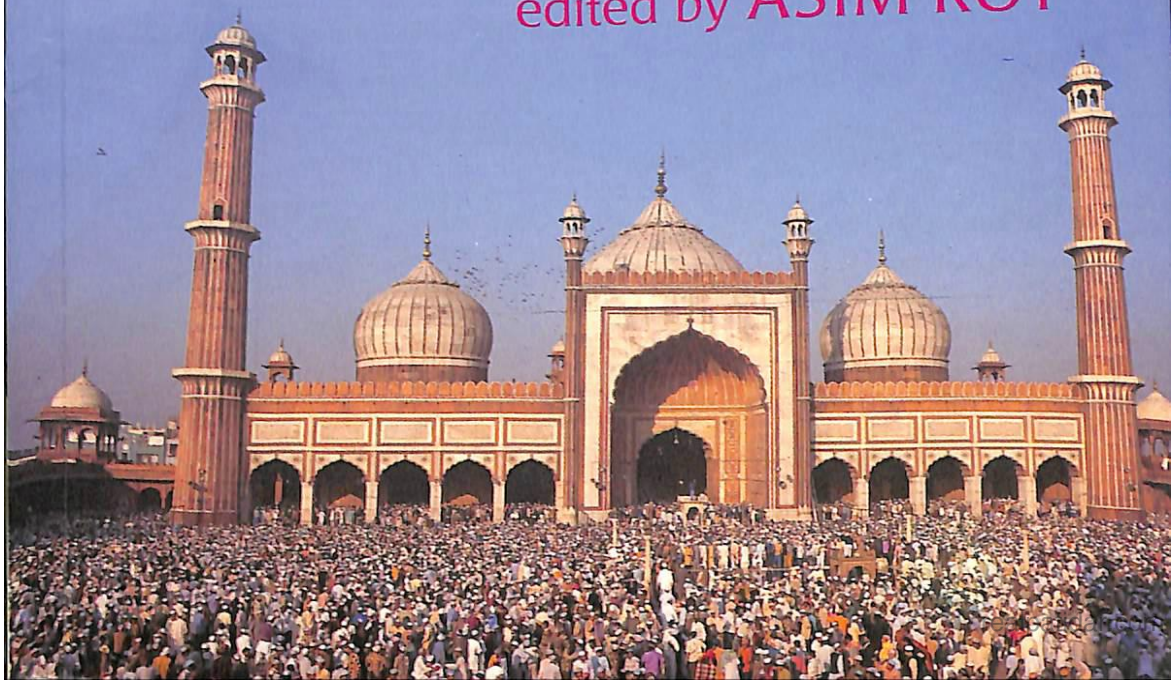
# Islam in History and Politics

## Perspectives from South Asia

edited by ASIM ROY



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# Islam in History and Politics

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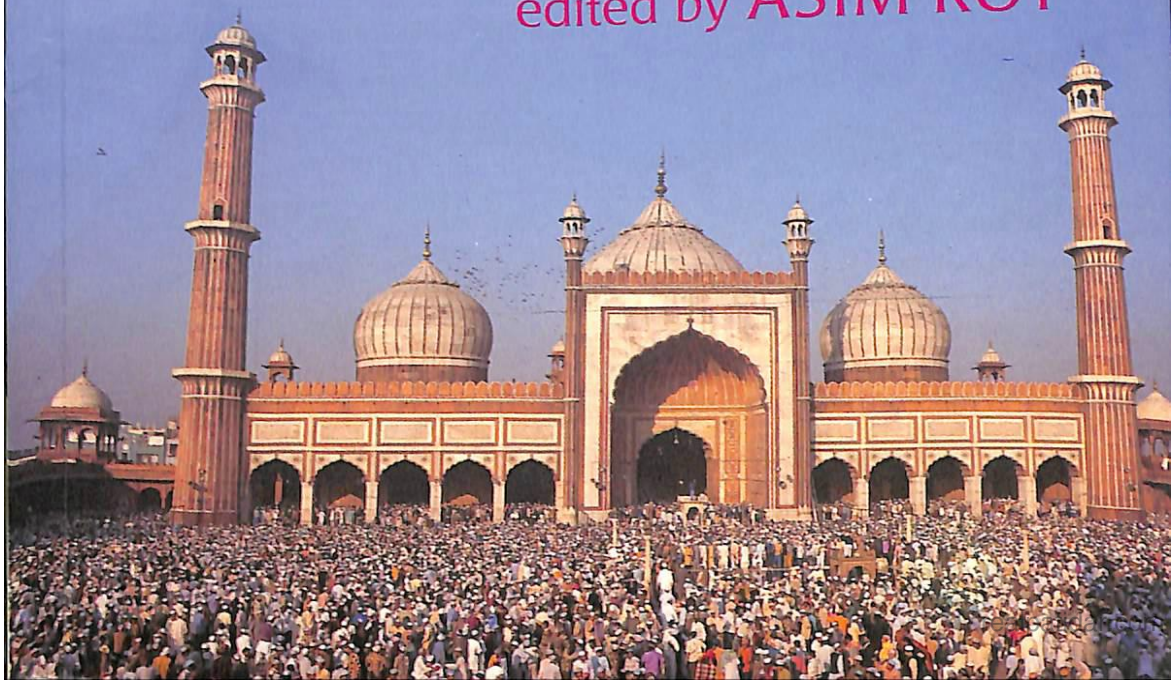

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This is very important section of this book, which relates to Pirana Satpanth, Taqiyya and Imam Shah.
See Related Items [25] and [97]

# 7

# Coexistence and Communalism

## *The Shrine of Pirana in Gujarat*

DOMINIQUE-SILA KHAN AND ZAWAHIR MOIR[1]

In India, as elsewhere, Islam still tends to be perceived as a monolithic phenomenon. The study of its historical and contemporary aspects continues, more than often, to be restricted to 'legalistic' Sunnism which, as a result of the writings of both earlier Sunni theologians and orientalists, is considered to be its normative form viewed in isolation or in opposition to other religious movements.[2] The important part played by other Islamic traditions in the subcontinent, the various forms of interactions which existed and still exist between Islam and indigenous movements, the intricate issues of conversions and the emergence of clear-cut religious identities towards the end of the nineteenth century, have begun only recently to attract academic attention.

In particular, the role of Ismailism in its South Asian acculturated form has been considerably underplayed by scholars mainly concerned with the interface between Sufism and Hinduism, and the conflicts which have torn the 'rival religious communities', once more preconceived as two opposed monolithic blocks.

The *Imamshahi* tradition of Gujarat, centred on Pirana near Ahmedabad, which we have chosen to introduce here exemplifies in itself some of the complexities of the subject. This sect of Nizari Ismailism (itself a branch of Shia Islam) which emerged in the fifteenth century and survives to this day in spite of numerous crises, continues to play a part in contemporary Gujarat. Unfortunately the literature on the subject is rather scanty and does not fully comply with the requirements of modern scholarship. Besides, as no recent studies of the Imamshahis are available, the contemporary developments within the sect have not yet been analysed. This essay—part of our ongoing

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research project[3]—thus seeks to fill up a gap and, while challenging earlier perceptions of the subject, raises a number of issues. Their elucidation could help us to a better understanding of past and present South Asian society, especially by revealing the range of ambiguities and complexities that can underlie and thus call into question what seems like straightforward communal conflicts.

## A Visit to Pirana

For a traveller or a pilgrim unaware of the intricacies of history, religion, and politics in western India, visiting the shrine of Imam Shah located at Pirana, about sixteen kilometres from Ahmedabad, can be a unique experience. Eager to see one of the famous *dargah*s (Muslim shrines) of Gujarat our visitor would hastily cross an enclosed courtyard and look around, searching for the entrance to the mausoleum complex. At first he would not know where to direct his steps but his attention being eventually attracted by an inscription on one of the side walls, he would most probably be confused, if not bewildered, after having read its contents: 'way to the *samadhi*', knowing that *samadhi* is a term commonly referring to a Hindu funerary monument.[4]

This would not be the only surprise in store. After having entered the precincts of the dargah one is confronted with another amazing fact; the priests who are in charge of the main tomb, that of Imam Shah and of his son Mohammed Shah, claim to be Hindus. When the pilgrim comes out after having bowed in front of the graves, a man clad in white puts on his forehead a *tilak* (religious mark) of saffron colour. Besides, by focusing one's attention on the open courtyard, a few more details become conspicuous—the Hindu syllable *Om* is painted at various places on the walls which do not, however, shelter any temple but a few more tombs and a big mosque.

Obviously, the visitor is confronted with one of the so called 'syncretistic' traditions of the subcontinent which have been described by various scholars since the last decades of the nineteenth century. From the religious message of the saints Kabir and Nanak to the sharing of festivals, cults, and sacred places between Hindus and Muslims, a whole range of interesting phenomena have been the focus of scholarly studies or the subject of articles published in Indian newspapers and magazines. As far as the latter are concerned, the case of Pirana has not failed to attract the attention of Gujarati journalists who chose to report on some recent events.[5]

The general tendency is to view this type of phenomenon either as the result of 'spontaneous' interactions between Hinduism and Islam

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(particularly Sufism), or as the conscious efforts of some religious figure to reconcile two opposite traditions. The historical context is seldom analysed, or even taken into account, as if it were not relevant for understanding the present situation. In this respect Pirana, as described by the journalists and even by some of its devotees, has been no exception. The coexistence of Hindu and Muslim elements, which one can observe within the shrine complex, are accounted for in the same simplistic terms—Imam Shah is portrayed as a tolerant Sufi saint of the fifteenth century who, 'fed up with the Islamic regidities',[6] created a sect where elements drawn from various Hindu traditions were associated with Sufi Islamic beliefs and practices. According to this version, the new order, referred to as *Satpanth* (true path), admitted among its members Hindus as well as Muslims without demanding conversion. Therefore Hindu *Satpanthis*, who were by far the more numerous, would have retained through the centuries their religious and caste identities, while Muslims also continued to follow their previous customs.

Of course, such a naive point of view, common to so many ancient and modern hagiographes, leaves one essential question unanswered—what does one understand by 'conversion' and 'religious identities'? Undoubtedly, the past decades have shown how crucial this particular question can be, the recent developments at Pirana exemplifying its importance for the subject which occupies us.

However, without a proper knowledge of the historical context, totally ignored by the media as well as by the 'official' publications currently available at the Pirana shrine, it is not possible to grasp the issue in all its complexity nor to see all its implications.

## The Nizari Ismaili Mission in South Asia

Historians have long been aware that the Imamshahi sect of Pirana is an offshoot of Nizari Ismailism, a branch of Shia Islam[7] and there is ample evidence to support this view.[8] In the eleventh century a quarrel of succession led to the formation of two mainstreams: Mustali and Nizari Ismailism. From Iran which has been its main seat,[9] the Nizari mission (*dawa*) penetrated into the Indian subcontinent some time during the twelfth or thirteenth century. There it was mainly known as Satpanth, a name which was a local equivalent of the Arabic *sirat-e-mustaqim* by which the Ismailis referred to their religion. Historically of course, the Satpanth must not be viewed as a different branch or sect of the Nizaris but rather as a South Asian acculturated form of their faith. Adaptation to the historical circumstances, as well as to the local

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environment has played a major part in the history of Ismailism. In the Muslim countries where it emerged and developed it had to face, for many centuries, the hostility of the Sunni or Twelver Shia rulers and of their theologians who considered its followers as heretics (*malahida*).[10]

The Ismailis have always struggled to survive their identity crisis and problems of fragmentation have been a constant threat in their history. When the Nizari missionaries reached the subcontinent they were confronted with the same problem, as the Sunnis from Central Asia had already established their rule in Delhi and elsewhere. But they had to respond to another challenge, of attempting to convert the non-Muslim population following various beliefs and practices which can globally be termed 'Hindu'. At this stage it is necessary to recall that the Sunni rulers of the subcontinent were less concerned with conversions than with conquests,[11] whereas conversion was an essential part of the idiom of the Ismaili dawa. Thus, in order to avoid persecution, the Nizaris resorted to the usual process of *taqiyya* (concealing one's identity and true faith in case of danger, which is a permitted Shia practice), they appeared outwardly as Hindu *yogis* and saints or as Sunni Sufi pirs, according to the context in which they had to work,[12] never revealing their real identity to those who were not properly initiated. Besides, to attract the Hindus or the Jains they recast their doctrines and rituals in forms that were more familiar to the converts who were allowed to retain most of their customs whilst they themselves practised taqiyya, for which reason they came later on to be referred to as *Guptis* (secret ones). Let us add that the experiences of the pirs and of their followers in practising taqiyya should be studied and understood separately, concealing one's true faith may have meant something different for the spiritual leaders and for the ordinary members of the *panth*. Be that as it may, among the achievements of the Nizari missionaries one must mention the ritual of the *ghat-pat*[13] and the religious poetry known as *ginans*[14] in which indigenous and Islamic elements are closely interwoven.

It was in fact a whole vision of history or rather of meta-and hiero-history[15] which was proposed to the new converts in a form which could be directly understood by them, for example, the figure of the Imam, so essential in Shia and, in particular, in Ismaili philosophy,[16] was associated with Vishnu and his ten main incarnations (*das avatar*). But while, in common Hindu belief, Vishnu's tenth *avatar* is expected only at the end of our era (*kali yuga*), in the new 'Hinduized' Nizari idiom his advent had already taken place; he was none other than Imam Ali, the Prophet Muhammad's son-in-law who became manifested in the successive line of Imams. The Ismaili belief in time cycles[17] was

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somewhat akin to the Hindu concept of yugas, so that Vishnu's previous incarnations could be made to fit into an already existing conceptual framework. The centrality of this idea is attested by the fact that, till recently, a ginan entitled 'Das avatar' was a part of the regular prayer session in the Nizari *jamat-khana*s where the Khojas (one of the names used to refer to the Nizari community of the subcontinent) gathered three times a day.[18] Ultimately it is the whole Islamic concept of successive revelations completing and superseding each other which was retained, in the same way as Judaism and Christianity had been accepted in the Quran as successive phases of the sacred history, the past as reflected in Vedic and Brahmanical mythology was integrated in a form modified to suit the requirements of Ismaili ideology. Therefore, it is not only as a result of taqiyya (precautionary dissimulation) but also as a expression of this idea, that Nizari Ismailism, conceived as the latest Revelation, was referred to, in its South Asian context, as the *Athar* (sometimes Arharva) or fifth Veda, following the Brahmanical Artharva Veda.[19]

To conclude this brief survey it will not out of place to add a few words about the subsequent evolution of this branch of Islam in the subcontinent. A few historical records[20] supplemented by traditional oral sources tell us of the setback suffered by the dawa, mainly in the fifteenth century, when various groups seceded from the parent body. Among these one should mention the Imamshahi sect of Pirana,[21] and most probably various groups in Rajasthan and other parts of north India.[22] The weakening of the central authority represented by the Imam residing in Iran, who most of the time had to live in concealment, allowed various religious bodies to attract the Nizari convert into their orbit. The influence of British power and ideology associated with the arrival of the Aga Khans (the living Imams) in the subcontinent in the nineteenth century led to a re-evaluation of the identity of the Khoja community,[23] best illustrated by the famous Aga Khan court case of Bombay (1866). The spiritual leader of the Nizaris forced them to choose between these alternatives—either follow him and pay the customary tithe (*dasondh*) or integrate into another community, Sunni, Twelver Shia, or Hindu.[24] The British concern for clear-cut categories, mirrored in the census operations of that period, as well as the activities of some local revivalist movements which were a response to the colonial challenge, created a pressure which made it more and more difficult for social groups to retain intermediary or 'liminal' religious identities.[25]

In this way the Nizaris who remained faithful to the Aga Khans were gradually, through various fluctuant phases, led to re-Islamize their tradition to suit the requirements of a particular policy aimed at a

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rapprochement between Ismailis and their former rivals in the Muslim world.[26] Meanwhile those who had chosen to adopt a different religious identity followed their own way.

To sum up, the main features of Nizari Ismailism, in its South Asian form, should be stressed once more: acculturation, shifting of identities according to the historical and local contexts, and the practice of taqiyya reflected by the existence of Gupti communities. These are specific phenomena the extreme significance of which needs to be emphasized.

## A Crisis of Identities

Scholarly literature on the Imamshahi sect is rather scanty.[27] The only extensive study was conducted by W. Ivanow, a well-known specialist of Ismaili studies.[28] In his article published some sixty years ago, the historical link of the Pirana Satpanth with Nizari Ismailism is fully acknowledged although, in the absence of any documentary evidence, the exact way in which the whole process of secession and dissidence occurred can be only conjectured. A reason why the historical role of Ismailism in the subcontinent has been greatly under-estimated is precisely the scarcity of written documents, a fact which can find its natural explanation in the necessity of taqiyya.

We will not dwell at length on the history of the sect as reconstructed by Ismaili sources, since this essay deals only with one particular aspect of the subject. It will suffice here to mention its principal phases and its most salient features. Imam Shah was the son of Hasan Kabiruddin (d. 1470), one of the main pirs or local leaders of the Nizari mission, the centre of which was located at Ucch-Multan (in present Pakistan). It is said that, at his father's death:

> ...he failed to win the Imam's nomination or the support of the Khojas of Sind and...went east to Kachchh and Gujarat, where he succeeded in converting many Hindus from the Kunbi peasant caste. He eventually established his headquarters at Pirana near Ahmedabad where he was buried.[29]

One tradition has it that his son Sayyid Nar Muhammad Shah (d. 1533) declared that Imam Shah was not merely a pir but the real Imam of the time.[30] His breakaway would have led to the emergence of the Imamshahis of Gujarat and Khandesh as a distinct group, separate from the Khojas and the term Satpanthi or 'followers of the true path', used in the ginans to describe all Ismailis came to be particularly reserved for the Imamshahis.[31]

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The subsequent history of the sect is complicated by inner schisms which led to the formation of three other branches, respectively known as Athias, Satias, and Panchias,[32] not to mention the attempts of the various rulers of Gujarat and the Mughal governors to 'Islamize' these groups which had often fragmented the community. As a result, a separate mosque was created within the complex to accommodate changes to Sunni and Shia followers.[33] It is further believed that during the eighteenth, and perhaps the nineteenth century, the two groups attempted to win followers from each other's communities.[34] The Imamshahis have their centre at Pirana, as has been said above, and their own versions of the ginans.[35]

More than half a century having elapsed since Ivanow's study, it will be interesting to compare his valuable data with our preliminary research. For instance, according to his inquiries, Imamshahis do not acknowledge any historical connection with the Nizari Ismailis. Each branch attributes a different origin to the founder pirs, for example, those who appear now with a Ithna Ashari Shia identity will link the pirs with a Twelver Shia Imam.[36] The same author also alludes to the fact that 'many Hindu bodies are making efforts to reconvert the Satpanthis to Hinduism'.[37] However, among these, he mentions only the Arya Samaj.[38] Before going further it will be necessary to specify here that at the time of Ivanow's research as well as at the present time the members of the same sect, which is historically known as Imamshahi, appear with at least three distinct identities: the majority of disciples are Hindus from various castes, in particular from a section of the agricultural Kunbi community that now refer to themselves as Patels or Patidars,[39] while the remaining ones define themselves as Muslims, both Sunnis and Twelver Shias.[40] We will see that this interesting phenomenon is accounted for in various ways according to our informants. For the moment, suffice it to say that the efforts of the 'Hindu bodies' as mentioned by Ivanow were clearly aimed at those who termed themselves Hindus although they followed, in conformity with the Satpanthi ideal, a good many Muslim customs, such as the practice of burial and the erection of graves (*mazars*) in the Islamic fashion. For the sake of comparison it must be added that a similar campaign was launched at the beginning of our century by the Arya Samaj with its *suddhi* programme, among various other groups with 'liminal' identities.[41]

It is clear that, from the last decades of the nineteenth century onwards, defining or redefining one's identity as a group within the Indian society had become a crucial issue, where economical and political factors played a much more important role than religious considerations.[42] Questions which had never been raised in the past grew

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more and more significant and 'syncretic' or 'composite' traditions less and less acceptable, unless, as in the case of the Sikhs, they chose to proclaim themselves as religious movements outside the pale of Hinduism and Islam, which tended to be represented as hostile blocks. For centuries the Satpanthis, whether appearing outwardly as Sunnis, Shias, or Hindus, had more or less peacefully shared a sacred space.[43] In the new context which arose before and after Partition, a major split emerged within the community over questions of religious identity, which, once more, could not be dissociated from issues of power and money.

## Dividing the Sacred Space: Conflicting Voices

A major event occurred in 1939 when, at the conclusion of a long court case (civil suit no. 168 filed in the court of the F.C. sub-judge at Ahmedabad on 13 February 1931), a Trust was created to resolve various disputes about the management of the dargah and the use of land and funds pertaining to the shrine. In this suit, a number of Patels lodged a complaint against the Hindu *guru* of the sect, Kaka Ramji Laxman, then supported by a few Muslim Sayyids.[44] The resultant Imam Shah Bawa Rauza Sansthan Committee consists of ten members, three Sayyids from different constituencies and seven Kacchi Patels—this ratio being calculated according to the proportion of Satpanthi followers (at present it is claimed about nine hundred thousand of which perhaps 85 per cent register themselves as Hindus and 15 per cent as Muslims). Later on the Trust was registered by the charity commissioner according to the Bombay Public Trust Act of 1950, under category E which is defined as 'cosmopolitan'.[45] The composition of the Trust was to ensure a fair management of the shrine, while the cosmopolitan nature of the sect was to be guaranteed by its registration under category E.[46]

However, in contemporary Indian the existence of a majority of Hindu members within a sect recognizing a Muslim pir as its founder could not but pose a serious challenge to all those who were eager to re-evaluate caste and religious identities. On the other hand, the sanctity of tradition, coupled with the legal protective framework, does not usually allow total freedom to the followers who wish to introduce certain changes. It is interesting to study the different responses which have been made to this challenge by various Indian communities, organizations, or sects over time.[47] Reconstructing one's own history according to the new ideology seems to be a universal strategy which has been widely resorted to through the centuries.

Let us now return to Pirana. Our first impression, undoubtedly a superficial one, when we first visited the shrine in January 1999, was

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that we were confronted with a Hindu versus Muslim conflict—the space, we felt at that time, was divided rather than shared. The large open courtyard, with its various sacred structures and pattern of square stones, conjured up the image of a huge chessboard at both ends of which the rival players, while seemingly ignoring each other, were engaged in a silent game. In front of the main tomb sat the white-clad Patels who had told us the 'true version of the story' that is the Hindu identity of the shrine, the best evidence of which was that the perpetual light (*akhand jyot*) burning in the samadhi was made of *ghi* (clarified butter) and not of oil which would have been the case if the shrine were a 'real' Muslim dargah. Just opposite the dark-clothed Sayyids, descendants of Imam Shah Bawa, sitting in front of the saint's *gaddi* (throne), a more modest structure, claimed that their tradition has been shamefully distorted; to prove this they had proudly stood up at the end of our conversation to recite the whole sacred genealogy in which, nobody could question it, only Muslim names appeared. When we had started our visit, even before reaching the main place of worship, our attention had been attracted by a model standing on a low platform, inside the enclosed courtyard. It represented various buildings, including what was visibly a temple topped by the classical *shikhara* superstructure. The Patels told us that it was the model of a new complex under construction not far from the village. It would include a *gurukul* school and a majestic temple referred to as *Jyoti mandir* or *Niskalanki Narayan ka Mandir*. Niskalanki, it was specified, was their main deity (*aradya dev*), the tenth incarnation of Vishnu whose cult was a essential part of the Satpanth. A similar place of worship already existed, opening on the same courtyard. It had been arranged inside the former resting place of Imam Shah (*dholia*) and was used for the daily *arati* (Hindu offering cult) as well as for the specifically Satpanthi ritual of holy water or ghat-pat. It was really breathtaking to see, so close to the Muslim dargah (even it has been renamed samadhi by the Patel worshippers) what strikingly looked like a Hindu *mandir*. If the walls depicted the miracles of Imam Shah and his life, the ceiling was entirely covered by colourful representations of the ten avatars of Vishnu and of other gods and goddesses. In the recess, which could have corresponded to the inner sanctum (*garbhagrha*) of a temple (but which was oriented towards the West as the *mihrab* in a mosque or a tomb) we could see a mural depicting the Hindu trinity, Vishnu, *Mahesh* (Shiva), and Brahma. On the gate one could read the words *puja khand* (prayer hall). The Patels added:

> If you want more information you must see our Guru, the supreme leader of our Panth, Kaka Acharya Karsan Das Maharaj.... Then you must see the

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books we are selling at our small bookshop (these are our own publications) and please do no believe other people and do not read any other books since they are not genuine....

We promised to buy all the books and the shrine being closed for some time, went to partake of the common meal served in the community's *langar*, in the company of numerous Patels and, to our surprise, a family of Agakhani Ismaili Khojas. But when the shrine reopened, instead of going immediately to see the supreme Guru, we re-entered the open courtyard with the intention of drawing a map of the various sacred structures. And there, unexpectedly, we were captured by the 'enemy'. Under the shelter of the *chajja* covered by a white cloth upon which shone words of protestation in bright red paint, sat a few young and middle-aged men, most of them wearing dark-coloured clothes, some of them ostentatiously displaying their Muslim identity by wearing the usual laced cap, whereas, curiously enough, all the custodians of the various tombs (*mujavars*), whether Hindus or Muslims, were wearing exactly the same white cloths and 'Nehru' cap. When we reached the spot the Sayyid players had been sitting regularly on this side of the chessboard for about two hundred and eighty days in *dharna*. In order to protest, they had created the Imamshahi Sadat Committee headed by M.M. Sayyid and Nuruddin Sayyid.

'Our heritage (indeed they are descendants of the large Imam Shah family) has been hijacked,' they explained, giving us a tract which we carefully read. It began with the following words: 'this shrine is a symbol of secularism and national integration... now this shrine has become a place of communalism and fascism'. And then we had to listen to another version of the Pirana tradition—Imam Shah, as we were told, was the son of the Sufi pir Hasan Kabiruddin who came to Gujarat from Multan. He traced his descent back to Imam Jaffar al-Sadiq and his son Ismail, and that is why he himself and all his descendants, including the present Sayyids, are known as 'Jaffri Ismailis'. At first we silently triumphed, tempted to conclude that our informant admitted, directly or indirectly, the Shia Ismaili origin of the sect. But we were soon disillusioned—Ismaili? Did it mean that that Imam Shah was a Shia? The reply came immediately—he was a Sufi, neither a Sunni nor a Shia, a detail which overthrew all our former convictions.[48] And, as if the blow were not mighty enough to shatter the rest of our illusions, one of the men added: 'we are Sunnis'. And he pointed to the mosque where he and his brothers offered regular prayers (*namaz*) five times a day. After this interruption he went on with the story of Imam Shah.

According to him, the saint converted many Hindus, and entrusted to one of them the custody of the dargah. These people, who are celibate,

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are referred to as kakas which means 'servant' in Persian. Why should a mere servant entitle himself 'Guru', '*Acharya*' and '*Maharaj*'? Karsan Das, we were told, had undertaken a series of changes which were not in conformity with the Satpanth—painting the Om sign everywhere, publishing a revised version of the traditional literature, transforming the dholia into a temple with idols, while image worship is strictly prohibited in this religion, changing the name of the place into 'Pirana Prena Pith' and, still worse, the founder of the movement into a Hindu pir.[49] If these Patels were converted by Imam Shah, we enquired, why do they do that? The answer came unhesitatingly—these people are Guptis... they look outwardly as Hindus, in reality they still follow (yes, even now) a number of Muslim customs which are a part of the Satpanth.

This declaration comes as a most exciting revelation, although it sounds strangely familiar to us—the Gupti phenomenon is well-known in the history of the Nizaris of the subcontinent and till recently many Khojas concealed themselves under the guise of Hindus. Thus, according to the Sayyids the present identity of the Patels was essentially a form of taqiyya. Conversion to Islam 'really' took place. Now what happens is that, under the influence of fundamentalist Hindu bodies, they want to revert to a full-fledged form of Hinduism, a fact which we must acknowledge, had already been noted by Ivanow. According to Sayyid:

> The Kaka is a life member of the VHP. This fundamentalist organization is attempting to take over the shrine. Our opinion on the subject is clear: if himself and his supporters want to introduce changes of this type they had better abandon the place and go somewhere else to follow their new religion.

These words had led us to formulate an interesting hypothesis—if the Hindu members of the Panth were in reality crypto-Muslims (the Patels), was not the Sayyid Sunnism originally also a form of taqiyya? Imam Shah himself had married the daughter of a (Sunni Sufi) Suhrawardi saint, and one of the wives of his son, Muhammad Shah, was the daughter of the equally Sunni Sultan of Ahmedabad. Would these marital links have been possible at that period if both pirs had openly acknowledged their Shia Ismaili identity?

One can surmise that in the course of time, what was now happening to the Patels had earlier taken place with these Sayyids; from a kind of Gupti Sunnism they had passed into a state of more overt Sunnism. Later, looking across the chessboard at the white Patels who stared blankly at us, we were reminded of our promise and took leave of our informants. And ultimately we went upstairs to the Kaka's 'retreat'. There we bowed in front of an imposing character wearing a flowing

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white beard, a ochre-coloured turban and displaying a red tilak proudly on his forehead. The Maharaj was quietly sitting on a bed near a window, in a modern room equipped with a cooler and a telephone. He greeted us with a smile, which made it difficult to believe that he was a 'Hindu hardliner'.

If we had not studied the historical background of the Imamshahi sect and had no knowledge of the Ismaili tradition, we would have been in the same position as our imaginary visitor or pilgrim, that is to say in a state of total confusion. But the main elements of the Satpanth were already familiar to us, owing to the fact that they were basically the same as in the Nizari Khoja tradition. Niskalank, Atharva Veda, ginans and many other names and concepts reminded us of one essential factor—the acculturation of the Ismaili idiom in South Asia. It was clear that, if one chose to stress these 'Hinduized' patterns and to play down or leave out the Islamic themes, the sect had a decidedly 'orthodox' Hindu appearance.

Imam Shah, according to Karsan Das, was 'a Sufi saint' (a definition which also occurs occasionally in the official literature of the Patels). When we asked 'what do you mean by Sufi'?, and with the dim hope that he would after all acknowledge some sort of Islamic connection, the Acharya rejoined: ' Sufi like Kabir, Nanak, the nine Nath yogis...' However original this definition of Sufism sounded to us (who had always naively believed that Sufism was the 'mystical dimension' of Sunni, and to a lesser extent, of Shia Islam) we had to accept it as one of the major moves of the invisible chess game, one which enabled the Hindu side to reconstruct history. The Kaka then continued: 'Sufism means brotherhood, absence of any discrimination, call these Sufic ideas or Vedic ideas, this is all the same...'. However, to our great relief, he spontaneously admitted that Imam Shah's father was Hasan Kabiruddin from Multan (another Muslim name) and that he had married Fatima, the daughter of a Sufi saint but added, as if he wished to underplay these well-known historical facts, that the saint was to be viewed as an avatar of the god Brahma, an idea which, we knew, perfectly coincide with the Nizari Ismaili 'patterns of transformation',[50] equating the Imam with Vishnu and his representatives, the pirs with Brahma. The Acharya's discourse was, after all, reassuring—Imam Shah had had, among his disciples, not only Hindus, such as Bhabha Ram, Kiki Bai, Naya Kaka, but also the Persian Hazar Beg; the shrine was referred to by Hindus as samadhi or mandir, by Muslims as *rauza* or dargah, the Guru could be equally called pir or *Bawa*. The main *mantra* of the sect was '*Om Niskalanki Naranaya namaha*' but, concluded Karsan Das, it was also possible to use the words '*Pir Shah*'

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(as, we both silently remembered, in the Nizari tradition), and even to recite the Kalma. Gratified by these revelations, we started to think that, after all, the chief accusations levied by the Sayyids from across the Pirana chessboard were a little too far-fetched—the Kaka was not at all appearing as a fundamentalist, a fierce exponent of Hindutva.

During the following days, however, we started to read the 'official' Satpanthi literature sold at Pirana. It was amazingly different from what the Kaka had told us, except the name of Imam Shah himself and the adjective 'Sufi' (but again in the sense used by the Acharya) Islamic characters and elements were totally absent. Imam Shah had become 'Satguru Sri Imam Shah Maharaj' portrayed in the pictures available at the bookshop as a saint with a long black beard, holding a rosary in his right hand and displaying the same red tilak which decorated the forehead of Karsan Das (also Maharaj). His ancestors, and even his father, were mentioned nowhere, as if he had directly fallen from Heaven. There was not even the slightest allusion to the existence of Sayyids, or other Muslim disciples.

We had been told by the Patels to ignore all the other books which were not sold here. Thanks to this precious advice we had learned of the existence of rival publications. The Sayyids had their own books telling the same stories in their own way, and to make matters worse, we learned of the existence of a secret locked chamber at Pirana sheltering heaps of dusty books and manuscripts containing a third version of the same story, the oldest one. The key to this 'archive' was carefully kept by a third party who presided, invisible, over this silent game of chess, the man who claimed to be the legitimate *sajjada-nishin*, the physical and spiritual heir of Imam Shah, although he was not recognized as such by all Satpanthi followers, whether Hindus or Sayyids. However, we had to meet him to try to harmonize the disturbing cacophony of all these conflicting voices.

## The Invisible Pir: A Contemporary Case of Taqiyya

In the end, when the clouds of ignorance were dispersed we saw clearly that, as in many other cases, the Pirana dispute was not exactly a Hindu versus Muslim conflict. According to the Hindu nationalist reconstruction of Indian history (curiously initiated by the British author James Tod), Maharana Pratap, the Hindu ruler of Mewar (present Rajasthan), was fighting a battle against the Mughal emperor Akbar for the liberation of the Hindu nation from the tyranny of Muslim rule.[51] Although this version is still unfortunately the most popular, the facts, as recorded

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by non-sectarian historians, are somewhat different. On one side we have the rebellious Pratap helped by an army of equally rebellious Muslim Pathans (Afghans), on the other the ambitious Hindu *Raja* of Amber sent by the none less ambitious Akbar. Instead of this supposedly eternal Hindu–Muslim enmity, we have thus a battle for territory and power between two coalitions whose religious identity is of little concern. Somewhat similarly, the following facts were gradually revealed to us after a few meetings with the above-mentioned 'third power'—there were Muslim Sayyids siding with the Hindu Patels and their elected Kaka, and Hindu Patels supporting the protesting Sayyids. So it was not a game opposing the 'white' Patels to the 'black' Sayyids.

If we had not known earlier of the existence of the 'invisible Guru' we would probably never had met him, as neither the Patels, nor the Kaka, and not even the Sayyids had made the slightest allusions to him. His photograph did not appear anywhere, contrary to the ubiquitous picture of the Hindu Acharya, and there was no trace of his existence either in the new 'official' literature. The Sayyids had finally acknowledged his existence when answering, rather reluctantly, our question: 'and what about Pirzada Shamsuddin (the heir of Imamshah who claims to be the sajjada-nishin)? They preferred not to talk about him as he had treacherously 'passed over to the enemy'.

This was not at all surprising if one knew, as we later discovered, that the ignored Pirzada had supported Karsan Das, the present Kaka, during the 1987 election to the *gaddi* while the opposing Sayyids, who had proposed another man, Pachan Kaka as their candidate, had been defeated. So after all, if Karsan Das had behind him an invisible Sayyid the rebellious Sayyids had their hidden Kaka.

The Pirzada's address and phone numbers had been supplied to one of us by one Ismaili informant. We called, started to talk in Hindi and were answered in flawless English: 'you can come tomorrow at one o'clock...' His office (the seat of the Pirana Gurukul Education Trust) was located in a lane near one of the main streets of Ahmedabad, crowded with smaller and bigger shops, bustling with incessant traffic. We were ushered into a tiny room where we were welcomed by a neat late middle-aged man wearing a coat and a shirt in the Western fashion, sitting behind a desk like a businessman or the manager of a modern company. We were to meet him three more times and these sessions would extend over long hours. He was like the director of a theatre who would reveal to us the secret mechanisms behind the stage.

His father, Sayyid Ahmad Ali Kakhi, has been a prominent writer of the Satpanth and most of the copies of his works which had not been sold or given to the Satpanthi disciples were piled up in the famous

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locked chamber of Pirana, waiting for better times. Luckily for us, we were able to acquire a few of them which the Pirzada kept in his own store, at Ahmedabad. Shamsuddin said:

> My father was fighting to rescue the Satpanth, and his battle was fought with the pen... I am continuing his work, but according to the necessity of the time, I have to do it through politics. Karsan Das, who was my candidate for the election to the gaddi, could win only thanks to my power, but his main rival, Pachan Kaka, and the Sayyid party who supported him could not accept their defeat and started to create trouble. The protest of these Sayyids is not dictated by religious but political considerations: what they want ultimately is simply to overthrow Karsan and replace him by their own man, Pachan.

However, our informant admitted that the greatest danger was coming from the various fundamentalist bodies which attempted to draw the members of the sect into the orbit of Hindutva. Some villagers had already, under their influence, started to abandon the 'True Path', taken over a portion of the land attached to the original shrine and started their own temples with idol worship. The dividing line between the cult of the specifically Satpanthi Niskalanki Narayan (the tenth incarnation of Vishnu) performed in the *nirgun* way without the presence of an image[52] and the worship of Lakshminarayan, who was a pan-Hindu modern form of the Brahmanical Vishnu, represented by an idol, could be wafer thin. But a greater peril was looming ahead. Karsan Das was ambitious. There was no denying that he had made a hazardous rapprochement with the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and its allies, although it had been allegedly done for taqiyya purposes, that is to protect his followers and prevent the eventual dissolution of the Satpanthi. Being thus recognized and approved, in its new revised version, by the exponents of Hindutva, the sect founded by Imamshah could survive and its 'humble servant' (kaka in Persian) would be promoted to the rank of a real Acharya Maharaj, in other words one of the leading sants of the VHP. But now the enemy was within. 'I had told him not to go so far...' declared the Pirzada. But he himself never intervened directly, for fear of communal riots. He thought it wise to sit here, silently pulling the strings through letters, phone calls, and meetings with the various personalities of the political world who were his friends. He went to Pirana only three times a year. In other words he was himself obliged to practise taqiyya.

Shamsuddin was perfectly aware of the historical link of his sect with the Nizari branch of Ismailism which developed in the subcontinent. The pirs who are also revered by the Khojas, such as Shams or Sadruddin, he explained, were all Satpanthis. After Kabiruddin there had been a split; according to him those who were to be known as

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Aghakhani Khojas drifted away from the 'True Path' while Imam Shah's line remained faithful to the original religious message. What was amazing, though, was that the Pirzada insisted on the fact that he, also, was a Sunni, that the tradition was a Sunni (Sufi) one, and that the influence of Shiism came much later.

Karsan Das, he explained, was a Guru only in the sense of religious teacher, he was not like a real pir,[53] which only a physical and spiritual heir of Imam Shah could be. However, he knew all the secrets of the Satpanth, including its Muslim elements, perfectly well. In the Satpanth and its very conception of meta-history (as, we thought in the Nizari Khoja tradition) Islam and Hinduism were closely interwoven. For instance, among the descendants of Krishna (the Imam of the time in the *Dwapar Yuga* in Hindustan) who went to Arabia were Muhammad, Ali, and all their sons and grandsons. 'Most of my Hindu *murid*s', said Shamsuddin, as if he wished to account, in another way, for the publication of revised versions of the former literature expurgated from Muslim elements, 'do not read texts with Islamic contents, they would not understand. But those who long for the true spiritual knowledge can have access to these things, first through a *mukhi* (an important functionary of the sect at the local level, the one who also leads the ghat-pat ritual) then through Karsan Das and eventually, for the final and total initiation, they have to come to me only...'.

So there were various stages of initiation—from the basic ritual through which each Satpanthi child was integrated into his community, to these more esoteric phases which enabled him to obtain the 'ultimate' knowledge. But even the murid who had gone successfully through these stages kept his earlier appearance, his customs, his Hindu name etc.

These words, as we almost immediately realized, were of exceptional importance. In fact it amounted to acknowledging the fact that these Hindu murids were Guptis (a term which had been used by the Sayyids as well). However, it must be stressed that Shamsuddin denied that the process could be called 'conversion'—embracing the Satpanth and acceding to its ultimate revelation did not amount to being 'converted'. One remained Hindu, Sunni, or Shia nonetheless.

Shamsuddin, the 'invisible pir', had decided to let the players go on without interfering directly:

> See, for example, the fate of an important book written by my father, *Yogya vidhi*... the Patels of Pirana has issued another expurgated version of it which they sell openly at their bookshop, while the original *Yogya vidhi* (which is no more distributed) is with me only. Now the rival Sayyid party, the supporters of the defeated Pachan Kaka, have published their version and recently filed a suit; they are showing that the new 'official' book has

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drifted away so much from the Satpanthi tenets that it is in fact another religion which is reflected in it... Karsan Das, of course was embarrassed, so to protect himself he was obliged to produce my father's version and to declare that the book sold at Pirana had been released without his permission.... The original version, no one could deny, was representing the ideas of our tradition. The Kala could no longer be accused of having betrayed the Satpanth. So, in the long run, the old Satpanthi truths, which have been concealed, do surface once more... I have always believed it would be so. I have dedicated my life to this purpose....

## Facing the Saffron Brigade: Hindus Reinvent Taqiyya for their Own Purpose

Should the alliance struck by Karsan Kaka with the Sangh Parivar and his active membership in the VHP be seriously considered as a modern form of taqiyya? One has to remember only the legendary Ismaili pirs of Hindustan concealing themselves under the guise of yogis (some of them may have even become members of the Nath sect) or Sufis, in the latter case even taking formal initiation into some 'orthodox' *tariqa* to see that this may not be so absurd as it seems.[54]

Whatever the truth, one cannot deny that the 'Saffron Brigade', on its side, has set for itself very clear goals. Having produced another version of the earlier Aryasamaji suddhi,[55] the *dharm parivatran*, it continues to function as a 'factory for conversions of various communities to (their form of) Hinduism'.[56] According to the protesting Sayyid Party, the events which took place at Ayodhya on 6 December 1992 were like a starting signal for the Hindu hardliners; they would not (or could not after the destruction of the Babri Masjid) demolish the mosque at Pirana, instead, they began a slower process of undermining. They prompted the Kaka to cut its electricity and water supply and to forbid the Sayyids to have access to the common kitchen, forcing them to start their own separate langar. The Sayyids also started to perform the ghat-pat ritual separately. Since the Bharatiya Janata party (BJP) had formed the government in Gujarat, the Sangh Parivar could act much more freely. If one believes the representatives of the Sadaat Committee, it was also in 1992 that the Akhil Bharatya Sant Parishad, an organization within the VHP, met at Sarsa Gurugadi, district Kheda.

Karsan Kaka had become the president of the Parishad (henceforth ABSP) for the Western zone. It is said that the committee decided at that time to expurgate Islamic symbols and traditions from the Satpanth. The next meeting of the ABSP which was the ninth one, took place in Jaipur and for the venue of the tenth one, Pirana was selected. In 1995

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another extraordinary event occurred, the Bharatiya Vedic Dharm Samelan which met near Mumbai. There the ambitious Kaka, who decidedly emerged as a powerful exponent of the Hindutva ideology, was seen, in a photograph, nearly hand in hand with none other than the working president of the VHP himself, Ashok Singhal. There the triumph of the Acharya of Pirana was total when 'a number of doubts concerning the sect were cleared up' and the Satpanth tradition was declared to be one of the many 'Vedic *sampradayas*' (religious traditions) of India. To celebrate the victory of Hinduism there was a magnificent procession where the Guru of the Satpanthis was seen majestically seated on an elephant. Eventually in May 1997 in the Gujarati province of Kutch, the thirteenth session of the ABSP commemorated as a grand event the tenth anniversary of the election of Karsan Das. This event as well as the Vedic Samelan are the subject of a special issue of the magazine *Satpanth Jyoti* and of a commemorative volume issued at Pirana. Both the volume and the magazine are abundantly illustrated and among the religious leaders and political personalities one can identify prominent members of the Saffron Brigade.[57] In the light of these events it is easier to understand the project of the temple cum gurukul, the transformation of the dholia of Imam Shah into a puja khand, the release of expurgated and revised versions of the Satpanthi literature and so on.

Actually, it is possible to view the whole issue in more than one light. The VHP and its supporters may think that they have drawn back those 'syncretic Hindus' into the fold of Hinduism by forcing them to eliminate the Islamic elements or persuading them that their tradition had always been Hindu but had been distorted and misconstrued by the Muslims.[58] A leader of the Swami Narayan sect linked to the VHP,[59] for example, goes as far as to declare that, every doubt should be dispelled. Imam Shah was never a Muslim, he was born in a Hindu Brahmin family[60] but had to conceal his identity under an Islamic guise for fear of persecution. Here it will not be out of place of mention a similar phenomenon. The re-Hinduized followers of the Nizar panth in Rajasthan, faced with the difficult problem of revering a Muslim pir named Shams reconstructed his story explaining that he was in reality a Brahmin saint who dressed as a *fakir* to avoid being killed by the Muslims![61] One cannot help thinking that this 'inverted' case of taqiyya has been inspired by the original tradition of Ismaili taqiyya.

Ultimately it is difficult to decide who among the 'Hindu' Satpanthi followers who have joined the ranks of the VHP sincerely performs the Ismaili taqiyya as a faithful defender of the Imamshahi sect. Some 'Hindu' members of the sect claim to have on the contrary always

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concealed their identity to save Hinduism from the maltreatment of earlier Muslim rulers. Actually, the younger generations may not be aware of their Islamic roots and of the meaning of taqiyya.

## The Sandal Ceremony at Pirana

### *Sharing a Sacred Space*

Each year, on the twenty-fifth day of the month of Ramzan, the sandal ceremony or sacred bathing of the tomb of Imam Shah is celebrated with much solemnity on the occasion of the death anniversary of the saint, also referred to as *Urs*. When we arrived in the morning the open courtyard was already bustling with activities. But in the late afternoon the crowd became thicker, as the time for the sandalwood ceremony (*chandan vidhi*) was nearing. The formal members of the Satpanth are far from being the only visitors to the dargah. If the opposing parties had decided to engage in a relentless war, the ordinary devotees had firmly resolved to celebrate the Urs as usual. Clad in white drapery, a Hindu worshipper of Imam Shah who was not a follower of the Panth (he was from the Rabari caste) was repeatedly circumambulating the main shrine. He explained to one of us that he had been cured of a certain disease by the grace of the pir and was coming regularly to the dargah after his vow had been fulfilled. Sunnis from the nearby villages were devotedly offering chaddars (ornate clothes laid on the graves of Sufi saints), incense, and flowers to the grave of Hazar Beg, the Persian disciple of Imam Shah. As I approached the huge flagstaff on the top of which an immaculate white flag was fluttering in the breeze (was it white because of the Suhrawardi connection or because it was the colour of the Atharva Veda?), I caught sight of a group of women sitting on its platform and reading the Quran. They invited us to join them and seen revealed themselves to be Twelver Shias from the Nurshahi Momin Jamat.[62] When we came back to Imam Shah's tomb, which was the main centre of attraction, we saw a saffron-clad *sadhu* standing near the gate, rosary in hand, murmuring some mantras, while a fakir wearing black clothes and a black turban was performing a similar exercise.

This was the striking, reassuring image of a peacefully shared space. Early in the afternoon the Kaka had come to perform certain rituals before returning to the first floor where he quietly sat on a chair in front of his room. In the sacred enclosure the white Nanak Das Patel, the *karbhari* (religious functionary in charge of the shrine) was standing in front of the gate to the samadhi in the golden light shed by the last rays of the sun, while the dark Nuruddin Sayyid, one of the leaders of the

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Sadat Committee, was thoughtfully pacing the platform in the shade, behind the shrine.

Strange as it may seem, the Pirzada had not come to honour the ceremony. However, we could feel his invisible presence everywhere, as when he had told us, during our last interview: '*zamana kharab hai*...' (we are living in a dark age), 'but it will be soon the end of the Kali Yuga and the time will change....'

## *Endnotes*

1. Our thanks are due to our respective husbands, A.S. Khan and Martin Moir, who accompanied us on our various trips to Gujarat and fully and fruitfully participated in our research work.
2. F. Daftary, *The Isma'ilis, Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge, Delhi, 1990), p. 22.
3. The authors are currently preparing a comprehensive study of the Imamshahi sect.
4. It would be interesting to note that at the shrine of the goddess Ai Mata at Bilara, in Rajasthan, the case is exactly the reverse. A Hindu devotee visiting the temple would be surprised to read the following words engraved on a marble slab: dargah of Ai Mata. For more details see D.S. Khan, *Conversions and Shifting Identities* (Delhi, 1997), pp. 175–86.
5. See for example 'Distorting a Tradition', *Rashtriya Sahara*, (May 1988), pp. 24–5 and 'The Pirana Shrine becomes a Bone of Contention', *Indian Express*, Ahmedabad, 19 April 1998.
6. In 'Distorting a Tradition', p. 24, article mentioned in note 5 above.
7. S. Nanjiani, *Khoja Vrttant* (Ahmedabad, 1892, reproduced 1918); J.M. Campbell (ed.), *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency, Gujarat Population: Musulmans and Parsis*, vol. IX, pt. II (Guragon, 1988, reproduced 1990), pp. 66–7; W. Ivanow, 'The Sect of Imamshah in Gujarat', *JBBRS*, vol. 12 (1936), pp. 19–70; F. Daftary, *The Isma'ilis*; J.N. Hollister, *The Shi'a of India* (Delhi, 1953, reproduced 1979); A Nanji, *The Nizari Ismaili Tradition in the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent* (Delmar-New York, 1978); C. Shackle and Z. Moir, *Ismaili Hymns of South Asia: An Introduction to the Ginans* (London, 1992).
8. Unfortunately, this is not the case for other probable offshoots of Nizari Ismailism, such as the Nizar Panth, the Bishnoi Panth etc. See D.S. Khan, *Conversions*.
9. B. Lewis, *The Assassins, a Radical Sect in Islam* (London, 1967, reproduced 1985).
10. Daftary, *The Isma'ilis*, p. 5.
11. D. N. Maclean *Religion and Society in Arab Sind* (Leiden, 1989), pp. 22–36.
12. Nanji, *The Nizari Ismaili Tradition*, p. 68.

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13. A. Nanji, 'Ritual and Symbolic Aspects of Islam in African Context', in R.C. Martin (ed.) *Islam in Local Contexts* (Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1982).
14. Shackle and Moir, *Ismaili Hymns of South Asia*.
15. For the concept of meta-history in Shia and Ismaili philosophies, see H. Corbin, *Histoire de la philosophie islamique* (Paris, 1986), pp. 98–107.
16. Corbin, ibid., pp. 78–85.
17. F. Daftray, *A Short History of the Ismailis* (Edinburgh, 1992), pp. 139–40, 394.
18. Shackle and Moir, *Ismaili Hymns of South Asia*, pp. 157–9.
19. Ibid., p. 186.
20. Ibid., pp. 5–8.
21. Ivanow, 'The Sect of Imamshah'.
22. Khan, *Conversions*.
23. J.C. Masselos, 'The Khojas of Bombay: The Defining of Formal Membership Criteria During the Nineteenth Century', in Imtiaz Ahmad (ed.), *Caste and Social Stratification Among Muslims in India* (Delhi, 1978).
24. Masselos, 'The Khojas of Bombay, and H.A. Rose, *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North-West Frontier Province*. 3 vols (Delhi, 1919, reprinted 1990), p. 403.
25. S. Mayaram, *Resisting Regimes: Myth, Memory and the shaping of a Muslim Identity* (New Delhi, 1997), pp. 36–52.
26. On this fascinating issue see M. Boivin, 'The Reform of Islam in Ismaili Shi'ism from 1885 to 1957' in Delvoye F. Nalini (ed.), *Confluences of Culture* (Delhi, 1994).
27. There are the odd references in various publications, but the only study devoted entirely to this subject is Ivanow, 'The Sect of Imamshah'.
28. Ivanow, ibid.
29. Shackle and Moir, *Ismaili Hymns of South Asia*, pp. 7–8.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Ivanow, 'The Sect of Imamshah', p. 48.
33. The mosque which is located within the dargah complex was probably built during Aurangzeb's rule. The issue connected with the Islamization of the Nizari Khojas during the medieval Muslim rule has not been studied till now.
34. Ivanow, 'The Sect of Imamshah'.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid., p. 25.
37. Ibid., p. 20.
38. Ibid., p. 59.
39. Campbell, *Gazetteer*, pp. 66–7, and R.E. Enthoven, *The Tribes and Castes and Bombay* (Delhi, 1920, reproduced 1990), pp. 150–5.
40. However it is necessary to add that these Muslim followers were also originally Hindus who had embraced the Imamshahi faith before adopting the Sunni or Twelver Shia identity, probably in the seventeenth century, and later on, built the mosque. (Ivanow, 'The Sect of Imamshah', *passim*).

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41. Ram Narayan Contractor, the author of a book heavily criticizing the Imamshahi sect, was himself a Satpanthi who became a member of the Arya Samaj, underwent *suddhi*, and later on came close to the Swami Narayan religious reformist movement.
42. As suggested by the history of the Imamshahi sect, land disputes have always been crucial in this respect. Besides, one should not forget the role played by a British officer. Alexander Forbes who, as Tod had done for Rajasthan, sought to reconstruct the glorious part of Gujarat in order to give a distinct identity to this region. Forbes worked with the Gujarat poet Dalpatram Daya who edited an important journal called *Buddhi Prakash* in which an article on the Imamshahis was published in 1871.
43. It seems that in the past 'communal' conflicts occurred between Sunnis and Shias.
44. The term *kaka* which means 'servant' in Persian is used to refer to the Hindu leader of the sect. It is interesting to note that in the case of the recent conflict which we will examine further, most Sayyids are opposing the Kaka.
45. Category A applies to Hindu, Jain, and Sikh institutions, B to Muslim ones etc.
46. According to one of our informants, the registration under this category is being questioned as a result of a recent civil suit in which it has been proposed to register the shrine of Pirana under the *waqf* board which takes care of all Islamic places of worship.
47. Khan (1996) and (1997), *op. cit*.
48. With the exception maybe of the *be-sharia* Qalandars, wandering dervishes who do not follow the Islamic law or sharia. The Sufis generally belong to a particular order of *tariqat*, whether Sunni or Shia. For Indian Sufism see for example S.A.A. Rizvi, *A History of Suffis; in India*, 2 vols (Delhi, 1978, reproduced 1986).
49. It will be interesting to compare these facts with those found in the Rajasthani traditions of the Bisnoi and the Ramdev sects: the mausoleum of the saint Jambha, originally referred to only as *Mukam* (a word which usually refers to a Muslim graveyard) has been now re-Hinduized into 'Mutkidham Mukam' (from *mukti*, liberation, salvation and *dham*, sacred pilgrimage centre). Similarly, Baba Ramdev is traditionally called 'Hindu pir'.
50. T. Kassam, 'Syncretism on the model of the figure-ground: A Study of Pir Shams' Brahma Prakasa', in K.K. Young (ed.). *Hermeneutical Paths to the Sacred Worlds of India—Essays in Honour of Robert W. Stevension* (Atlanta, 1994), pp. 231–41.
51. J. Tod, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* (Delhi, 1829–32, reproduced 1983), pp. 253–64.
52. In the Indian devotional tradition (*bhakti*) the Nirgun or non-qualified God is opposed to the Sagun (qualified) Deity who can incarnate himself and be represented in the form of a sacred image.
53. Although, as we learned recently, before the re-Hinduization of the tradition, Karsan Das had been given the title of 'Pir Karim Kaka'.

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54. Nanji, *The Nizari Ismaili Tradition*, p. 68 and D.S. Khan, *Conversions*, p. 34.
55. K.W. Jones, *The New Cambridge History of India*, Vol. III, pt. 1 (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 100–3.
56. We are paraphrasing here the Arya Samajists who, on the contrary, once accused the Satpanth of being 'a factory fort converting the Hindus to Islam'.
57. We thank Christophe Jaffrelot for helping us to identify these characters and for his precious information on the Lakshiminarayan temples.
58. The case of the Ramdev sect is strikingly similar.
59. This Vaishnava sect, to which many Gujarati Hindus are affiliated, was founded by Swami Narayan in 1875. Curiously enough, according to an Imamshahi oral tradition, the founder had become a Satpanthi whose role was to collect the *dasondh* (obligatory tithe) from the members of the community. One day he is said to have run away with the money and eventually created his own religious movement. See A. Khaki, *Satpanth Yagya* Viddi (Pirana, 2nd ed.), p. 57. Be it as it may, many Patels who were previously affiliated to the Satpanth became followers of Swami Narayan.
60. After the non-sectarian movements founded by Kabir and Dadu (fifteenth and sixteenth centuries) became full-fledged Hindu Panths, a Hindu Brahmin origin was attributed to both saints.
61. Khan, *Conversions*, p. 69.
62. The members of the Nurshahi Momin Jamat seem to have been only recently converted to Twelver Shia Islam (Ithna Aharis), whereas the Sayyidkhanis represent the main the 'original' Ithna-Ashari stream within the Imamshahi tradition: while the former are 'faithful to the main shrine of Imamshahi' but have given up all Satpanthi rituals, the latter are connected with the Athia branch and have their own sajjada-nishin.

Communities that have converted to Islam by following Satpanth

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